

The Hub

The DragonFishers Hub is a partnership of four childcare providers in York city. The Hub comprises three early years settings: at St Georges RC Primary School, Fishergate Primary School and Ducklings Nursery, along with FunFishers - a breakfast, day and afterschool provider attached to Fishergate Primary School. Based just short walking distance from one another, St Georges RC Primary School, Fishergate Primary School and Funfishers have a long history of working together, including an established offer of blended childcare. They joined the Childcare Hubs project with the aim of improving the availability and quality of childcare locally. As well as strengthening their existing relationships, they also hoped to connect to other providers, with Ducklings Nursery being a recent welcome addition to the Hub.

Success and Impact

The Hub has a strong track record of delivering positive impacts for parents/carers and children through its **blended childcare** offer. This allows parents of children attending either St Georges RC Primary or Fishergate Primary to drop off and/or collect their child at Funfishers. The children are transferred between the settings by Funfishers staff throughout the day.

For some parents, the flexible childcare arrangement has enabled them to resume full-time working hours. The close relationship between the providers is important to parents; knowing that their child is familiar with the settings, their staff, and the other children gives them the peace of mind to leave them in their joint care throughout the day:

“It has made a big difference to us. Previously my wife only worked part-time and having the facility here has allowed us to both continue in full-time jobs” (Parent)

A key success of the Hub is the **sense of community fostered between the different settings** through regular joint events such as sports days and carol singing. The children are also encouraged to share their experiences across the settings through a ‘Talking Tom’ teddy bear diary that is passed between them. When the children read Tom’s diary they find out where he has been and what he’s done at the other settings.

Sharing best practice and **driving quality improvement** are important aspects of the Hub. The providers use Hub meetings as an opportunity to share learning from Ofsted inspections and to keep each other up to speed on policy and practice in new areas, such as expanding under 2s provision. As a result of the Hub, the providers are also coming together more frequently to undertake **cross-moderation of children’s learning journeys**. Furthermore, where individual children are transitioning between settings, the providers highlight any areas where they might need additional support and jointly discuss the best ways to meet their needs.

While the providers have been working together for some time, becoming a Hub has formalised this partnership and enabled them to focus on **collective objectives**, such as engaging with a wider range of parents/ carers. For the first time they will promote themselves under the single brand 'DragonFishers' - a name chosen to incorporate the identity of the three original settings. The Hub will be publicised to parents/carers through the website, banners, leaflets and social media.

Challenges

Expanding the Hub's reach to other providers, such as local childminders, has proved to be challenging. Childminders' irregular working hours can contribute to their lack of engagement, as they are less able to commit to attend Hub meetings. The providers are persevering and continue to reach out to the childminders that come into contact with each setting. They are being flexible in their approach by allowing childminders to affiliate with the Hub without attending all Hub meetings.

Learning

A number of learning points are apparent from the DragonFishers Hub's experiences:

1. **Begin by building on what you already have:** at DragonFishers, the original providers began with an existing partnership and are using this as a foundation to show others what they have achieved to date. This will hopefully encourage other local providers to engage with the Hub in the future.
2. **Invest in maintaining relationships between the key individuals:** The providers benefit from strong relationships and maintain these through frequent contact beyond Hub meetings by phone, email and in person:
3. **Put the structures and processes in place to ensure the Hub's sustainability:** Formalising the identity of the DragonFishers Hub through the regular Hub meetings and the pending website means that the relationships between the settings will be sustained even if key individuals move on from their positions.
4. **Value the input of all partners equally:** A key example at DragonFishers is the regular cross-moderation undertaken where the professional judgement of all parties (whether from a nursery, school, or afterschool setting) is highly valued.

The future

Over the coming months the providers hope to launch their newly designed DragonFishers website, providing a 'one stop shop' for parents/ carers looking for high quality local flexible childcare. This will coincide with the beginning of the new school year, and with it a new cohort of parents and carers seeking flexible childcare to wrap around the school day. Alongside this, they will continue to meet regularly to share learning and good practice, and try to grow the partnership to include a wider range of local providers.